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Using a Suggested Program based on Intercultural Communicative Approach to Develop English Majors' Intensive Reading Skills and Critical Cultural Awareness

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using a suggested program based on intercultural communicative approach in developing intensive reading skills and critical cultural awareness of English majors at Faculty of Education, New Valley University. The quasi-experimental design, one-group pretest-posttest, was adopted in the present study. Thirty-five students (35) from second year English majors were chosen to participate in the experiment. Instruments of the study included a test of intensive reading skills and a test of critical cultural awareness. In addition, a suggested program based on the intercultural communicative approach was designed, validated and carried out. Results showed that using the suggested program significantly improved the study group's intensive reading skills and critical cultural awareness. Based on the results, the study recommended the integration of intercultural communicative approach in ELT.

Keywords: Intercultural communicative approach, intensive reading skills, critical cultural awareness**.**

استخدام برنامج مقترح قائم على نظرية التواصل بين الثقافات لتنمية مهارات القراءة المكثفة والوعي الثقافي النقدي لدى طلاب قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

المستخلص:

هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى قياس فعالية استخدام برنامج مقترح قائم على نظرية التواصل بين الثقافات في تنمية مهارات القراءة المكثفة والوعي الثقافي النقدي لدى طلاب قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية التربية بجامعة الوادي الجديد. تم استخدام التصميم شبه التجريبي للمجموعة الواحدة ذات الاختبار القبلي والبعدي في الدراسة الحالية. شارك في الدراسة خمسة وثلاثين طالباً من طلاب الفرقة الثانية تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية تم اختيارهم بشكل عشوائي. تضمنت أدوات الدراسة اختبار مهارات القراءة المكثفة واختبار الوعي الثقافي النقدي بالإضافة الي البرنامج المقترح. وقد أظهرت النتائج أن استخدام البرنامج المقترح قد أدى إلى تحسن كبير في مهارات القراءة المكثفة والوعي الثقافي النقدي لدى الطلاب المشاركون في الدراسة. وبناءً على النتائج، أوصت الدراسة باستخدام نظرية التواصل بين الثقافات في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية التواصل بين الثقافات، مهارات القراءة المكثفة، الوعي الثقافي النقدي.

1. Introduction

English language proficiency encompasses four essential skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, all of which are fundamental for EFL students. The primary objective of teaching these skills is to enable students to carry out communicative tasks successfully with both native and non-native English speakers across various social and academic contexts. In this context, reading holds a particular significance in learning a foreign language. It serves as a gateway for students to gain insights into foreign language symbols, signs, structures, patterns, literature, and history. Engaging with written texts not only exposes students to the linguistic components of the language but also fosters a deeper understanding of its cultural context.

Reading is universally recognized as a critical skill due to its pivotal role in expanding linguistic expertise and acquiring knowledge (Mohibu & Ismail, 2021). According to Hicks (2023), reading is an indispensable prerequisite for academic success and achievement. Similarly, Smith et al. (2021) underscores its integral role in constructing knowledge across all stages of learning. Furthermore, reading is considered a cornerstone in the comprehensive formation of human learning development. It facilitates the overall language proficiency and serves as a bridge to both language learning and cultural immersion (Pașcalău, et al. 2023). Research has emphasized that reading skills underpin language learning. They are fundamental for comprehension, critical thinking, and effective communication (Kahn & Anderson, 2019).

A major reading skill is intensive reading that emerges as a key factor in fostering a deeper understanding of texts, emphasizing accuracy, structure, and meaning. Whereas general reading encompasses fluency, decoding, and comprehension, intensive reading entails a meticulous engagement with texts and a detailed analysis of vocabulary, grammar, and discourse patterns. Research has emphasized the significance of intensive reading as it bolsters critical reading skills, enhances memory retention, and improves overall language proficiency. By incorporating intensive reading strategies into reading instruction, learners can refine their ability to extract essential information, interpret subtle nuances, and establish a strong linguistic foundation applicable in both academic and real-world contexts (Miftakh, 2018).

Deardorff (2020) asserted that intensive reading involves engaging with short texts in-depth, with the objective of answering comprehension questions, analyzing sentence connections, studying the author's intentions, and learning the content along with vocabulary. In this regard, Macaliste (2011) and Halim (2012) concluded that intensive reading often requires students to tackle challenging texts in terms of content and language, thereby promoting growth in vocabulary, grammar, and conceptual understanding. Shehata (2016) further asserted that intensive reading enriches learners' linguistic resources via introducing them to new vocabulary and structures. Meanwhile, they also provide opportunities for linguistic analysis across various levels. Moreover, cultivating a habit of intensive reading enhances learners' capacity to decipher unfamiliar words and phrases encountered in everyday conversations. Therefore, it is expected to expand students' vocabulary and develop their reading comprehension skills (Safaeia & Bulca, 2013).

Intensive reading, despite its recognized significance, requires more focused attention especially, in higher education, as highlighted by Osborn (2021), Khazaal (2019) and Al-Abed Al-Haq (2020). Furthermore, intensive reading faces certain challenges because of the necessity of careful planning and customization of learning to meet individual student's needs. That is to say, the success of intensive reading depends on selecting appropriate materials, employing effective methods, and fostering the active involvement of both students and instructors.

Moreover, intensive reading has a profound role in promoting cultural awareness, as it introduces students to diverse perspectives, traditions, and values embedded within texts. Through literary texts, historical narratives, and authentic material, students are expected to develop a deep understanding of a foreign language cultural norms, idiomatic expressions, and worldviews. In addition, students are expected to appreciate the linguistic and societal diversity. Linares (2023) noted that reading in a second/foreign language enhances linguistic proficiency while fostering intercultural sensitivity by enabling learners to interpret cultural references and to infer implicit meanings.

Similarly, schema theory, as proposed by Rahman et al. (2024), underscores the significance of cultural background knowledge in influencing reading comprehension, underscoring the importance of incorporating culturally relevant texts into reading instruction. This would enable instructors to bridge intercultural gaps and to promote students' adoption of diverse global perspectives. In this regard, Corbett (2022) proposed shifting the focus of ELT towards developing

learners' intercultural competence, with the ultimate goal of fostering intercultural speakers. In addition, readers are requested to process and assess the authenticity of reading materials and to expose their evaluation that reflects their cultural background and beliefs. Based on this assumption, the present study sought to allocate the meaning of critical reasoning or critical evaluation (Osborn, 2021). These assumptions assume that a pedagogical approach that combines reading strategies with cultural analysis can significantly improve students' reading comprehension and critical cultural awareness.

More widely, it is believed that students should be aware of other cultures. They need to learn how to question assumptions, challenge stereotypes, and consider the social, political, and historical contexts that shape cultural norms and interactions. Students who possess intercultural awareness are able to assess written documents in terms of their own culture, customs, and beliefs (Schat et al., 2022). Consequently, as future instructors, translators, or communicators, English majors are urged to move beyond surface-level cultural understanding to critically analyze cultural values, ideologies, and power relations embedded in language use and intercultural interactions.

According to Byram (2021), critical cultural awareness refers to students' critical and reflective evaluation of their own cultural perspectives and practices in contrast to others' cultures. In turn, this represents a fundamental ingredient of intercultural communicative competence. Hoff (2020) also emphasized that fostering critical cultural awareness empowers students to become more socially responsible and politically aware of language use.

Furthermore, recent research has emphasized the significance of developing critical cultural awareness in EFL classrooms, and highlighted its role in fostering intercultural competence, reflective thinking, and ethical communication (Nugent & Catalano, 2015; Fenner 2015; Fang, 2017; Hazaea, 2020; Liu & Fang, 2020; Cierpisz, 2022; Schat et al. 2022,). Most researchers recommended that EFL curriculum should aim at helping students to genuinely communicate with foreign communities and understand their cultures and know how these cultures are different from their own. Recent studies have called for integrating metacognitive strategies and intercultural education into reading instruction to enhance both linguistic and cultural competencies (Baker, 2017; Deardorff, 2020). In response to these recommendations, intercultural communicative approach has emerged as a highly potential and integrative approach to develop both intensive reading skills and critical cultural awareness in EFL classrooms.

According to Yanchan (2022), intercultural communicative approach seeks to raise students' awareness, understanding, and acceptance of cultural differences, to cope up with cultural challenges, and to communicate successfully with persons and texts that belong to other cultures. Intercultural communicative approach is defined as a pedagogy that aims at developing students' intercultural awareness, regardless of students' age or educational stage, to foster the assumption that considers education as a base for dialogue and peaceful living (Huber & Reynolds, 2014). It is worthy to say that the intercultural communicative approach has its own teaching practices, assignments, techniques, and procedures that guarantee the development of students' linguistic and intercultural communicative competence that entails knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Samia, 2019).

Intercultural communicative approach has gained prominence as a dynamic and pedagogically sound framework for integrating language learning with intercultural understanding. Several studies have called for incorporating intercultural elements into language education not only to enrich students' cultural awareness but also to enhance their overall language proficiency, and, consequently, preparing them for effective communication in diverse global contexts (Upton & Kassim, 2019; Samia, 2019; Bakić-Mirić et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2023; Lee et al., 2023). This approach extends beyond the traditional focus on linguistic accuracy to include students' ability to interpret and reflect on cultural meanings embedded in texts. Using intercultural communicative approach, as a framework to develop intensive reading skills, is expected to provide students with adequate opportunities to decode language structures and textual details. Also, it urges students to engage critically with the underlying cultural contexts, values, and ideologies presented in the reading materials. This dual focus enables students to move from surface-level comprehension to deeper cultural interpretation and reflection**,** thereby fostering critical cultural awareness**.**

2. Context of the problem

Intensive reading has a profound role in achieving real comprehension, particularly for English majors who need to access complex texts critically and analytically. However, many students were struggling with intensive reading, which requires a deep engagement with texts, close analysis of language structures, and ability to extract implicit meanings. This difficulty gets worse with a lack of critical cultural awareness, which limits students' ability to understand written texts within their broader cultural and ideological contexts.

Moreover, despite the students' exposure to EFL content and global themes-based texts, the researcher's empirical observations indicated that the majority of English majors at Faculty of Education, New Valley University, face difficulties in interpreting culturally embedded meanings, recognizing cross-cultural perspectives, and critically engaging with texts that reflect diverse worldviews. Additionally, classroom observations highlighted the overreliance on surface-level reading comprehension, where students focus on literal meaning without exploring the underlying cultural assumptions. Consequently, students were unable to achieve a real and deep comprehension of texts from different socio-cultural backgrounds. Also, they could not assume the role of competent readers in both academic and professional contexts.

To make sure that the students have difficulties in intensive reading skills and critical cultural awareness, an integrated test was administered. The test consisted of two reading passages, where students were requested to answer both reading and culture stimuli questions (reading questions= 18; cultural knowledge questions were 16). Results of the test indicated that English majors (n=24) had a limited ability to question cultural stereotypes or assumptions embedded in the written texts, showing a tendency to accept or reproduce information without critical evaluation. Furthermore, students were unable to compare and contrast their own cultural perspectives with those of others, which is a key component of critical cultural awareness.

The results of the test also indicated that students were unable to distinguish the central idea from supporting details, especially in longer passage. Understanding implied meaning rather than explicit statements represented a frequent challenge. Students had difficulty in detecting whether a text is meant to persuade, inform, entertain, or criticize, especially when tone is subtle or culturally nuanced. Linking words (e.g., moreover, however, despite, thus) or reference pronouns (this, that, these, those) caused learners' confusion. Many students failed to identify the structure of a text (problem-solution, cause-effect, chronological order), which is a core skill of intensive reading, and to map this mentally. Also, students were unable to infer meaning of unfamiliar words from context, especially when texts were dense, or the surrounding clues were abstract.

To investigate the challenges that address the students in intensive reading and their critical cultural awareness level, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with experts and language instructors (n=8), along with a sample of

second-year English majors (n=35). The findings revealed that despite the recognized significance of intensive reading skills, they have long been overlooked. This may be due to the prevalence of conventional methods of reading instruction. It was concluded that the students encounter difficulties not only in English courses broadly but also in honing their reading skills specifically.

Moreover, the reading textbooks used in the above-mentioned courses often present content that failed to engage students, resulting in boredom and lack of motivation. Instructional practices were largely text-driven, with teachers providing minimal assistance to enhance students' comprehension. In reading lessons, students just read the text, translating difficult words and answering the following questions which are limited to the superficial information included in the text. Advanced reading comprehension levels, such as critical and creative, were almost neglected.

Also, it was noticed that the current reading instruction practices emphasize translation of English texts into Arabic. Teachers didn't use strategies or ask questions that would help students to develop their deep reading comprehension, and to assess their critical cultural awareness. Consequently, students had significant difficulties in comprehending the text. Most reading instructors used to ask questions that cover the literal level of comprehension as these questions demand extracting some directly mentioned details from the text. Students were not given the chance to practice intensive reading skills that are appropriate for university students' linguistic level.

In relation to culture integration in EFL learning, English majors clarified that many textbooks and classroom resources focus predominantly on presenting fragmented cultural facts such as holidays, food, and clothing, rather than encouraging students to critically analyze the social, historical, and ideological dimensions of culture. Such material often lacks authentic and diverse cultural representations and fails to offer tasks that challenge students to reflect on or to question cultural assumptions. As a result, students were mainly dealing with a superficial understanding of culture that did not equip them with the necessary skills of critical evaluation and intercultural reflection.

More investigation of reading instruction practices has revealed that traditional teacher-centered approaches prioritize grammatical accuracy, vocabulary memorization, and passive reading over interactive, inquiry-based, and reflective practices. Lessons tend to emphasize linguistic competence while

neglecting opportunities for students to engage in discussions, debates, or comparative analyses that would stimulate critical thinking about cultural perspectives. This rigid focus on language form rather than meaning limits students' exposure to real-world intercultural challenges and prevents them from developing the analytical skills necessary for exploring diverse cultural contexts effectively.

Based on the diagnostic study, and the recommendations of relevant previous studies, Abdul Rahman et al.(2018); Osman (2021), Schata et al. (2022), it has become obvious that there was a real need to change the current approach of teaching reading and to adopt an alternative one that may improve students' intensive reading skills and critical cultural awareness.

3. Objectives of the study

The current study sought to:

1. Develop English majors' intensive reading skills.
2. Develop English majors' critical cultural awareness.

4. Questions of the study

The current study attempted to answer the following two main questions:

1. To what extent would an intercultural communicative approach-based program be effective in developing English majors' intensive reading skills?
2. To what extent would an intercultural communicative approach-based program be effective in developing English majors' critical cultural awareness?

5. Hypotheses of the study

The present study sought to verify the following hypotheses:

1. There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study group in the pre- and post-test of intensive reading skills in favor of post administration.
2. There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study group in the pre- and post-administration of critical cultural awareness test in favor of post administration.

6. Review of Literature

6.1. Intercultural communicative approach

The following section presented a comprehensive analysis of the concept, significance, principles, and the utilization of intercultural communicative approach in EFL environment.

6.1.1. Concept of intercultural learning

According to Moscato et al. (2014), "intercultural" refers to mingling two cultures or more. As a result, learners are exposed to a foreign culture. This enables learners to acquire intercultural competence that entails knowledge about the target culture, norms and values that are appreciated and presented as models. Also, it refers to the communication skills needed to interact successfully with people who possess different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Fang et al., 2024). Interculturality is widely understood today as a dynamic and evolving process that refers to interaction, dialogue, and negotiation of meaning between individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds. Rather than perceiving cultures as static or isolated entities, interculturality acknowledges that cultural identities are constantly reshaped through contact, mutual exchange, and reflective engagement.

According to UNESCO (2013), interculturality promotes fair interaction between different cultures. Dialogue and mutual respect are the means to create common consensus, shared meanings, and fruitful practices. In this regard, mutual respect is an essential foundation for both educational and social development. In modern language education, the term intercultural is increasingly used to highlight the need for learners to go beyond acquiring linguistic skills alone and develop cultural literacy, including knowledge of social practices, values, and worldviews from both their native and target cultures (Byram, 2021).

The notion of intercultural communicative approach has emerged as a progressive stance in language pedagogy, emphasizing the inseparability of culture and language and calling for sustaining learners' ability to negotiate meaning across cultural and linguistic boundaries. As noted by Porto and Zembylas (2022), intercultural communicative approach aims to foster empathy, critical reflection, and global citizenship. It sustains students' active participation in a multilingual and multicultural world. Adopting intercultural communicative approach enables language education to meet one of its highest goals: to expand learners' worldviews, to encourage openness, and to achieve meaningful interaction across cultural differences.

According to this approach, language, culture, and pedagogy are viewed as deeply interconnected elements that shape both the educational process and learners' global readiness. Rather than limiting cultural learning to static facts about isolated traditions, contemporary research has emphasized the importance of encouraging students to practice effective reflection, to run cultural comparison,

and to adapt communication appropriately. In this regard, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) stated that intercultural communicative approach involves exploring both self and others through the lens of culture, helping learners understand that language is inseparable from the social and cultural realities where it is used.

The concept of the intercultural communicative approach refers to both the development of linguistic competence and the ability to interpret, relate, and critically reflect on cultural meanings during interactions across cultural boundaries. As explained by Porto and Zembylas (2022), this approach encourages students to move beyond mastering grammar and vocabulary, focusing instead on using language as a tool to negotiate meaning, bridge cultural differences, and challenge ethnocentric worldviews.

In language classrooms, the intercultural communicative approach encourages teachers to design learning experiences that integrate exposure to authentic texts, real-world intercultural issues, and collaborative discussions. As suggested by Liu and Fang (2021), this reflective engagement allows learners to question stereotypes, to understand cultural complexities, and to develop both linguistic accuracy and cultural empathy. Adopting this process is expected to enable students to acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to interact confidently and thoughtfully with people and texts from diverse cultural backgrounds.

In line with these ideas, the current study considers intercultural communicative approach a transformative pedagogical model that guides language teaching through a structured, process-oriented framework that combines linguistic competence, intercultural understanding and critical reflection. It enables EFL students to develop not only linguistic proficiency but also the intercultural skills of inferring, comparing, negotiating, reflecting, and analyzing cultural contexts. Thus, it encourages EFL students to move through a continuous cycle of exposure, analysis, reflection, and interaction.

6.1.2. Principles of intercultural communicative approach

This approach follows several core principles. First, students are encouraged to explore their own cultural identities and to recognize the invisible dimensions of their beliefs and communication styles. This self-awareness enables them to see their native cultural patterns not as universal, but as one possible perspective among many (Porto & Zembylas, 2022). Second, intercultural learning involves active exploration of cultures, where learners engage with authentic materials and

social contexts to deepen their understanding of how cultural values shape language use. This exploration leads to critical noticing and reflective analysis. This, in turn, helps students to construct personal meaning from their encounters with other cultural frameworks (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Third, learners are guided to investigate cultures using their own experiences as a baseline to detect similarities and differences with the target culture. This comparative process fosters decentering, which means stepping outside of one's own cultural viewpoint to understand and respect the logic of others (Moghaddam, 2023). This practice is central to overcoming stereotypes and building intercultural sensitivity. Finally, the approach emphasizes finding what scholars like Kramsch (2021) described as the "third place", a flexible mental and communicative space where students synthesize knowledge from both their own and the target culture. This third place allows learners to navigate cultural complexities without fully abandoning their own identity, enabling them to act as mediators between cultures rather than passive recipients of cultural knowledge (Porto & Zembylas, 2022).

In sum, intercultural communicative approach helps students reflect on both their own and foreign cultures, recognize similarities and differences, and develop the attitudes of empathy, curiosity, and openness needed for meaningful cross-cultural interaction. It fosters critical thinking, analysis, and the awareness of stereotypes, ultimately preparing learners to thrive in multilingual and multicultural environments.

6.1.3. Intercultural communicative approach in EFL classroom

The intercultural communicative approach views language learning as more than acquiring grammar and vocabulary; it positions culture as a lived experience and emphasizes the learner's active engagement in understanding both the self and the cultural other. Rather than treating culture as a static set of facts, recent research views intercultural learning as an evolving, reflective process in which learners develop the skills to interpret, compare, negotiate, and critically reflect on cultural perspectives (Byram, 2021).

Moghaddam (2023) asserted that the intercultural communicative approach to language education incorporates several key assumptions. Firstly, cultural topics, such as examining the construction of personal and group identities and values, are considered both engaging and motivational for learners. Secondly, acculturation, defined as the capacity to operate effectively within another cultural framework while preserving one's own identity, is deemed vital. Thirdly, the

process of fostering cultural awareness is viewed as a fundamental aspect of values education, encouraging learners to appreciate and critically engage with diverse cultural norms and practices. Finally, intercultural language education itself is expected to adopt a critically reflective stance, continuously evaluating and refining its methodologies to ensure an inclusive and thoughtful approach to teaching and learning.

A variety of instructional activities have been proposed to promote interculturality in language classrooms, aiming to foster students' ability to reflect critically on cultural diversity and their own cultural assumptions. Barrett (2018) emphasized the importance of engaging learners cognitively and emotionally with both their native and target cultures through guided discovery and reflective activities. These techniques foster intercultural understanding and encourage deeper engagement with cultural learning. These techniques include brainstorming, which enables learners to explore and organize their prior knowledge and assumptions about cultural topics. Short presentations provide a platform for students to share their personal experiences and cultural insights, fostering a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives. Critical incidents, whether real or fictional, allow students to analyze instances of miscommunication and highlight cultural differences, creating opportunities for meaningful reflection.

More instructional activities such as role plays and simulations immerse students in hypothetical intercultural scenarios, enhancing their ability to propose alternative perspectives. Similarly, project-based tasks encourage students to conduct independent research on cultural themes, promoting active and meaningful engagement. Ethnographic tasks, which involve conducting interviews or observations, expose students to practical cultural research methods and deepen their understanding of intercultural dynamics (Ocampo-Torrejón et al., 2020).

Additionally, quizzes and rating activities are utilized to provide specific cultural information and stimulate discussions, while pair or small group discussions encourage collaborative interpretation and intercultural dialogue. Finally, class discussions offer an opportunity to consolidate ideas, exchange insights, and reflect on different viewpoints, ultimately fostering a holistic intercultural learning experience (Zheng & Gao, 2019).

According to Ivenz & Klimova (2022), activities such as comparing familiar themes across cultures, identifying culture-specific references, composing reflective letters to fictional characters, and creating cultural adaptations of stories

(e.g., through comic strips or alternative endings) are effective in encouraging learners to notice cultural contrasts, question stereotypes, and develop empathy. Other tasks involve exploring symbolic meanings of numbers, colors, and social customs, analyzing cultural values reflected in characters' behaviors, and writing letters to literary figures to clarify culturally challenging situations.

In EFL context, teachers often serve as the primary linguistic and cultural model for students, especially in environments where exposure to authentic language use is limited. According to Fang et al. (2024), language teachers are not only responsible for facilitating linguistic proficiency but also carry out a crucial mission that seeks to foster students' intercultural competence which involves guiding learners in both understanding the target culture and reflecting on their own. Teachers are expected to urge students to examine the intersections between their home culture and the target one rather than presenting cultural knowledge as isolated or superior to their own background (Baker, 2018).

Moreover, EFL teachers are encouraged to create learning environments where cultural content is delivered neutrally and reflectively. This allows students to question, compare, and develop curiosity rather than adopting stereotypes or uncritically to absorb foreign cultural norms (Luo & Yang, 2022). As Porto and Zembylas (2022) noted, language instructors are requested to create a classroom atmosphere that respects both the learners' cultural identities and the cultural practices embedded in the target language, thus promoting a balanced and inclusive approach to intercultural learning.

Teachers' qualifications for intercultural instruction extend beyond language expertise. Successful intercultural teachers, as highlighted by Sercu et al. (2021), should demonstrate openness and curiosity toward other cultures, possess substantive knowledge of the sociocultural context of both the target and home cultures, and be able to design meaningful tasks that encourage learners to connect classroom knowledge with real-world cultural complexities. These tasks should nurture critical thinking, reflective comparison, and empathy — competencies central to effective intercultural communication.

In light of these considerations, the present study sought to integrate a variety of interactive language tasks designed to simultaneously develop students' intensive reading skills and critical cultural awareness. Activities included guided discussions, intensive reading, and interpretation exercises where students explore both their native and foreign cultural assumptions. A particularly effective context

for intercultural communicative approach is the analysis of authentic texts, which expose learners to authentic cultural narratives and behaviors in ways that encourage both linguistic skill and cultural reflection. As Fang and Baker (2018) argued, authentic texts offer students opportunities to decode the social and cultural layers embedded in language, fostering an understanding that moves beyond superficial cultural facts toward deeper, and more awareness. When students engage with authentic texts critically analyzing the values, perspectives, and social practices represented, they do not only enrich their language learning experience but also develop the intercultural skills necessary for real-world communication.

6.1.4. Intercultural communicative approach & TEFL

Integrating cultural materials into language education is a longstanding practice; however, contemporary approaches place greater emphasis on understanding culture through comparative analysis. The Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching approach exemplifies this shift, positing that culture is best learned through comparison. Research has indicated that incorporating this approach enhances both language proficiency and intercultural competence among learners. For instance, a study involving Vietnamese EFL learners demonstrated that a 13-week intercultural communicative approach-based program led to notable improvements in both language skills and intercultural understanding.

The intercultural communicative competence model, presented by Byram in 2021, highlights the necessity of moving beyond linguistic proficiency to include cultural understanding as a core component of language learning. This approach calls for making intercultural knowledge and skills an integral part of the curriculum, thereby enhancing learners' ability to navigate and appreciate cultural diversity.

According to Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), when students read culturally rich texts, whether literary, journalistic, or functional, they are invited to confront unfamiliar worldviews, ideologies, and social practices embedded in language. This improves comprehension and deepens learners’ ability to critically interpret texts through the lens of both their own cultural framework and that of the target community. Thus, reading is no longer viewed as a passive act of understanding written content, but as a dynamic process of constructing meaning across cultural and contextual boundaries.

Byram (2021) highlighted that the intercultural communicative approach encourages learners to reflect on the implicit values and assumptions within texts, compare them to their own cultural experiences, and negotiate meaning rather than accept texts at face value. This interaction between the reader and the cultural content helps develop more nuanced reading strategies, enhancing both literal comprehension and inferential thinking, which are core components of intensive reading.

Additionally, Fang and Baker (2018) argued that intercultural awareness in reading sharpens students' critical literacy skills, as learners are encouraged to question the position, intentions, and cultural biases of both the author and themselves as readers. This process equips learners to approach texts with openness and skepticism, enabling them to navigate cultural ambiguity, recognize stereotypes, and distinguish between surface-level comprehension and deeper cultural understanding.

Porto (2019) conducted a study with Argentinian EFL students using literary texts designed to foster intercultural communicative competence. The study demonstrated that students who were engaged in reflective reading tasks, including comparison, interpretation, and discussion of cultural viewpoints, showed significant improvement in their reading comprehension and in their ability to articulate culturally aware interpretations of the texts. Similarly, Mardones et al. (2024) emphasized that intercultural reading tasks push students to observe and interpret cultural patterns rather than memorize isolated facts, which in turn strengthens both reading proficiency and intercultural competence. Tristiana et al. (2022) proposed that, with multicultural reading practices, students acquire cultural understanding and develop reading skills in English simultaneously. In essence, by embedding interpretation, comparison, and critical reflection into reading practice, the intercultural communicative approach transforms reading into an interactive, exploratory, and self-reflective act.

6.2. Critical cultural awareness

It is widely recognized as a fundamental component of intercultural communicative competence and is essential for preparing learners to engage thoughtfully and respectfully in global, multicultural settings. In Byram’s revised framework, critical cultural awareness is described as the capacity to appreciate various cultural perspectives, beliefs, and practices based on well-reasoned, explicit criteria rather than assumptions or stereotypes (Byram, 2021). This skill encourages learners to question the familiar, reconsider cultural norms, and

develop a broader and more self-aware understanding of their own identity (Cierpisz, 2022).

However, critical cultural awareness is not simply an attitude acquired passively through exposure to cultural information or interaction. Rather, as explained by OECD (2021), it is cultivated through reflective engagement, dialogue, and comparative analysis. This will enable learners to balance openness to difference with the affirmation of their own cultural identity. As Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) pointed out, developing this type of awareness requires learners to both recognize and critically reflect on how their own cultural assumptions influence communication and interpretation in intercultural situations.

Further, Ger (2023) emphasized that critical cultural awareness fosters an ethical and empathetic stance, enabling learners to adopt a non-judgmental and inquisitive perspective toward both familiar and foreign cultural practices. Through this process, learners gradually cultivate a sense of cultural equality, expand their tolerance, and develop the cognitive flexibility required to interact with cultural complexity without falling into oversimplifications or biases.

Moreover, as Porto and Zembylas (2022) highlighted, this skill involves three interwoven abilities: recognizing one's own culturally shaped behaviors, understanding the culturally driven behaviors of others, and articulating one’s own cultural perspective with clarity and self-awareness. These abilities enable learners to participate in intercultural exchanges, and to reflect critically on how power, history, and ideology shape cultural relations in both everyday life and global contexts. In sum, critical cultural awareness enables students to develop beyond simple cultural knowledge toward ethical reasoning, cultural empathy, and self-reflection, all of which are central for successful communication in today’s multilingual and multicultural world.

6.2.2. Competencies of critical cultural awareness

Critical cultural awareness encompasses a set of competencies that enable individuals to obtain deeper understanding of their own cultural identities while adopting an objective, unbiased perspective toward other cultures. Developing critical cultural awareness involves fostering critical thinking skills, encouraging inquiry, promoting problematization, enhancing meta-awareness, and cultivating a profound appreciation of one's own cultural beliefs and norms. To facilitate this development, a comprehensive framework comprising various categories and their

corresponding indicators has been established (Nugent & Catalano, 2015; Byram, 2021; Takagi, 2022; Schat et al., 2023).

The first category is self-discovery that involves abilities that reflect an individual's realization of home culture and patrimony. It emphasizes the importance of exposing and exploring other cultures to achieve a better understanding of oneself. self-discovery indicators include defining one's cultural identity, identifying one's value system, understanding one's heritage, and recognizing the significance of one's cultural heritage.

Decentering skills represent the second category and entails the skills of challenging stereotypical and ethnocentric thinking, as well as questioning one's judgments. Such abilities are essential for avoiding harmful generalizations and snap judgments. Decentering skills indicators entail challenging ethnocentric patterns, questioning one's own judgments, and accepting cultural differences.

Reflectiveness and meta-awareness category comprises abilities that require reflective and deep understanding of intercultural interaction process. Raising critical cultural awareness, particularly in contemporary language education, depends on maintaining the aforementioned cognitive abilities. Reflectiveness and meta-awareness indicators are analyzing situations from multiple perspectives, critically reflecting on one's own behavior, adopting a detached perspective, discussing concepts such as ethnocentrism, stereotyping, and value systems, and comparing one's home culture with foreign cultures.

Cultural understanding category involves comprehending the comprehensive notions and beliefs that underlying the target culture, recognizing diversity as an innate cultural feature, and realizing the complexity of intercultural relations. Indicators of cultural understanding include understanding and respecting differing opinions, and, recognizing the intercultural relations complexity.

The last category is attitude that represents a willingness to explore the other, to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds, and to raise mutual respect. This category also includes the tendency to empathize with those who represent other cultures. Based on the previous framework, the present study adopted the following components of critical cultural awareness:

- Students' ability to reflect on their own culture.
- Students' cultural knowledge of the foreign language culture.
- Students' ability to reflect on foreign language culture.
- Students' ability to cope with the different behaviors of foreign culture
- Students' adaptation of attitudes towards foreign culture and its people.

6.3. Intensive reading

To support the development of reading comprehension skills, intensive reading has emerged as a traditional and classroom-centered approach designed to help second language learners derive detailed meaning from texts. This method, as Carrell and Carson (1997) described, involves close analysis and teacher-guided translation to build linguistic competence. Brown (2000) highlighted that intensive reading requires learners to focus on structural and grammatical features, as well as discourse markers, and to comprehend literal meanings, rhetorical relationships, and implications. Similarly, Koay (2017) defined this practice as a thorough, word-by-word process aimed at achieving clear and specific goals through a detailed engagement with shorter texts. Therefore, intensive reading is viewed as a key means to achieve detailed reading comprehension skills.

In practice, intensive reading is typically conducted under teacher supervision. It emphasizes the importance of understanding new vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, as well as employing structured activities such as question-and-answer techniques and explanatory presentations. Through these strategies, learners enhance their ability to comprehend texts and increase reading speed. Yin (2015) argued that intensive reading significantly contributes to improving students' proficiency in English, establishing its role as a foundational element of language education.

Distinct from extensive reading, which allows learners to select texts of personal interest (Ni'mah & Umamah, 2020), intensive reading involves the systematic study of teacher-selected materials. This approach encourages learners to grasp both the lexical meanings and structural elements of the text (Ali, 2019). Moreover, Díaz (2015) emphasized that intensive reading requires students to identify and analyze linguistic forms within complex passages, often relying on cognitive and metacognitive strategies transferred from their first language. This process, carried out under the guidance and intervention of the teacher, highlights the rigorous and systematic nature of intensive reading in second language acquisition.

Silva and Araujo (2016) emphasized that intensive reading is integral to reading instruction because of its focus on the components of texts. The primary objective of intensive reading is to develop reading comprehension by engaging students in activities such as anticipation, locating specific information (scanning), identifying general ideas (skimming), and making inferences about the meaning of unfamiliar words. This process also involves extracting main and secondary ideas, recognizing connectors, and other critical skills. These activities, which are conducted under the teacher's guidance, encourage a thorough and detailed analysis of the text. In this context, readers are expected to employ varied strategies to identify specific details, discriminate between relevant and supplementary information, and draw inferences based on explicit content. Other researchers confirmed that intensive reading encompasses a set of skills as, making anticipations, inferring meaning, identifying the main ideas of paragraphs, and understanding unfamiliar idiomatic expressions or words (Ebrahimi & Rahimi, 2013; Coon, Ferrell, & Klott, 2014; Willis, 2014; Siboney, 2014; Díaz, 2015).

In 2018, Mórquez noted that intensive reading is a widely practiced method in foreign language classrooms, particularly within English language textbooks. It is typically oriented towards examining linguistic elements such as grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, and pragmatics, which all contribute to the overall comprehension of a text. Further, it focuses on other surface-level details to grasp not only the literal meaning but also the implied ideas, rhetorical relationships, and deeper nuances within the text. This focus on structure is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the material.

MacLeod (2013) mentioned that intensive reading skills involve identifying transitional words that link ideas, distinguishing between ideas and supporting details, understanding both explicit and implicit meanings, drawing conclusions, analyzing the order of information, and recognizing words that signal shifts between sections. These skills enable readers to engage with a text more critically and analytically. Similarly, Alderson (2015) added that intensive reading skills also include activities such as skimming a text to extract specific information, filling in gaps in summaries, scanning texts to match titles with paragraphs, and sequencing mixed paragraphs. However, he emphasized that the primary focus should be on helping students understand the material they are reading, suggesting that teachers allocate the majority of their instructional time to this crucial aspect of reading comprehension.

6.3.2. The significance of developing intensive reading

Intensive reading is a focused approach to reading that involves a detailed analysis of short texts, aiming to enhance language proficiency and comprehension skills. It has been widely studied and implemented in English as a foreign language classroom, highlighting its advantages and challenges. Intensive reading improves grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. It facilitates a deeper understanding of sentence structures and language nuances. It supports the development of writing, listening, and speaking skills through exposure to varied linguistic forms. As a means for structured learning process**,** it allows for systematic analysis of texts, aiding in the internalization of language rules and encourages learners to engage with texts critically, fostering analytical thinking (Ruiz, 2011), provides opportunities for teachers to guide students through complex materials, ensuring comprehension and retention (Yen, 2015).

In relation to language proficiency development, research has shown that intensive reading strategies significantly enhance reading comprehension skills in EFL learners (Paran, 2003 & MacLeod, 2013). For instance, Erfanpour (2013) carried out a study to determine the impact of using intensive reading strategies on developing the EFL participants' reading comprehension. The study confirmed that the significant improvement in participants' reading comprehension, especially comprehending details of the texts, is due to intensive reading practice.

In their experimental study, Kuhn and Stahl (2003) asserted the positive correlation between overall language proficiency and the utilization of intensive reading strategies. In other words, adopting intensive reading approach results in a significant improvement in participants' grammar and vocabulary. This, in turn, improves the other language skills. Similarly, Rashidi (2011) investigated how far the use of intensive and extensive reading would affect the vocabulary size and depth among EFL Iranian students. The results indicated that both approaches contributed to vocabulary improvement. However, intensive reading was more effective in improving the students' ability to understand complex vocabulary.

To conclude, intensive reading serves as a valuable tool in EFL education, offering significant benefits in language acquisition and comprehension. While it presents certain challenges, its structured approach and focus on detailed text analysis make it an essential component of a comprehensive language learning strategy. Balancing intensive reading with other methods can optimize learning outcomes and cater to diverse learner needs.

7. Method

This section includes design of the experiment, instruments, description of the suggested program, and the teaching procedures adopted to carry out the experiment.

7.1. Design

In the current study, the quasi-experimental design of one experimental group and pre-post applications of the tools was adopted. Thirty-five male and female students were selected randomly from second year English majors at Faculty of Education, New Valley University, to participate in the study. Approximately, all participants had the same age and EFL learning experience. The participants in this level study an independent course entitled "Reading", in which they should engage in a broader range of language practices, enabling them to improve their exposure to diverse linguistic experiences. Furthermore, the participants exhibited a real need to gain knowledge about other cultures, which is essential for enhancing their critical cultural awareness and understanding, thereby promoting a more comprehensive appreciation of cultural diversity. In addition to their need to develop their intensive reading skills, it is important in exploring culturally rich texts, allowing them to gain insights into different perspectives and contexts.

7.2. Instruments and material

This section presented comprehensive information about the intensive reading skills test, the critical cultural awareness test, and the content of the suggested program.

7.2.1. Intensive reading skills test

Objective of the test

The test, prepared by the researcher, aimed to evaluate the performance of second-year English majors in three specific intensive reading skills: literal skills, which involve understanding explicit information in texts; inferential skills, which focus on deriving implicit meaning and connections; and critical skills, which emphasize analyzing and evaluating text content. Additionally, the test aimed to assess the effectiveness of the proposed program based on the intercultural communicative approach in developing the study group's intensive reading skills across these dimensions.

Construction of the test

The construction of the intensive reading test was based on reviewing the most relevant literature and previous studies. An initial list of intensive reading skills was prepared. The list included (25) distributed on three main skills: six (6) literal skills, eleven (11) inferential skills, and eight (8) critical skills. The list was submitted to a panel of jury members who are specialized in teaching EFL (n= 9). They were requested to judge its suitability to the study group. In the light of the jury's recommendations, the researcher carried out the recommended modifications and prepared the final version of the list which included: (23) distributed on three main skills: six (6) literal skills, ten (10) inferential skills, and seven (7) critical skills. Based on the final list of intensive reading skills, the test of intensive reading skills was prepared.

Before constructing the test, the researcher prepared a table of test specifications to determine the content, the number of questions, and to ensure that intended learning outcomes were appropriately covered. The test adopted MCQ format. The test consisted of four reading passages and (46) questions; each assessed one skill of the target reading skills. One point was given for each correct answer. The maximum score was forty-six. The instructions of the test were written in simple and clear language. They provide students with adequate information about the objective of the test, number of items, and time allocated to finish the test.

Content validity of the test

The following criteria were used by the jury panel to decide the validity of the test: the formation of the items, the suitability of the items to assess the intended skills, and the suitability of the reading passages to the participants' level. The panel confirmed the validity of the test to measure the intended intensive reading skills.

Piloting the test

The test was piloted before the start of the experiment. Specifically speaking, twenty-five English majors were randomly chosen to participate in the pilot study. It reported positive findings and helped the researcher to determine the test duration to be ninety minutes.

The reliability of the test

Test-retest method was adopted to determine the reliability of the test. Correlation between students' total scores of the test in the two administrations was calculated using Pearson Product Moment correlation. The reliability coefficient of the test was (0.844) and it is significant at the level (0.01) which is acceptable.

Table (1)
Correlation coefficients of test-retest administration

The Dimension	Correlation coefficient
Literal	0.895
Inferential	0.853
Critical	0.737
Total	0.844

** Correlation is significant at (0.01) level.

Item analysis

After scoring the test, an item analysis was conducted to evaluate the difficulty level of the items, their ability to distinguish between high and low achievers, and to identify specific areas of the test content that require greater emphasis or clarification. The value of difficulty ranges from 0.33 to 0.7. These values were very suitable and within the acceptable level. The discrimination indices were found to be acceptable as they ranged from 0.3 to 0.47.

7.2.2. The critical cultural awareness test

Objective of the test

The test aimed to assess the participants' critical cultural awareness of the American culture. It also aimed to determine the effectiveness of the suggested program in developing the participants' critical cultural awareness of American culture after administering the program. The following topics were included in the test: racial discrimination, ethnic diversity, family, school life, festivals, social ceremonies and relationships.

Construction of the test

It consists of seventy-eight items in four sections constructed according to the objectives stated in the program. The first section is intended to measure students' ability to reflect critically on both their native and American culture. The second section measures the study group's knowledge of the American culture. The third one measures the study group's ability to cope with different behaviors. The last section explores the change in students' attitudes towards American culture. The test is of various types of question items Section (1) critical reflection: 9 open

ended questions; section (2), knowledge: 10 MCQ items and 8 T/ F items, Section (3) behavior: 18 situations of the American culture. The students should choose the best solution for each one, section (4) attitude: 18 items that express attitudes towards American culture. The students' responses presented on a five-point Likert scale which ranged from (strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, strongly disagree).

Scoring of the test

The items of the test were scored as follows:

- Section (1) consists of 9 open-ended questions - two points were given for each correct test item; the total score for this section is (18).
- Section (2) consists of MCQ and true/false questions - one mark was given for each correct item; the total score of this section is (18).
- Section (3) consists of situations of American culture- one mark was given for each correct test item; the total score for this section is (18).
- Section (4) the students' response lies within a frequency scale (agree, uncertain, disagree,). A value of "five" was given when the response was "agree" and decreased to "one" when the answer was "disagree". Total score that represented the highest positive attitude was (90).

Test instructions

Test instructions were written in simple and clear language. They provide the participants with enough information about test objective, items, and time allocated to finish the test.

Validity of the test

The test was submitted to the jury members who reported its validity. There was a consensus that the test was comprehensive and covered the course content, the stated objectives and the intended learning outcomes. Jury's acceptance was %89.6.

Reliability of the Test

The test was administered to a randomly chosen group of twenty-five second year English Majors. The reliability of the test was determined by using two ways:

1. Cronbach Alpha formula:

Table (2) shows the reliability of the test dimension and the reliability of test items.

Table (2)
Reliability Coefficient of cultural awareness test

The dimension	Reliability coefficient
Critical reflection	0.661 **
Cultural knowledge	0.661**
Behavior	0.701**
Attitude	0.690**
Total	0.642**

** Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level.

Table (2) shows that the reliability coefficient of the whole test is 0.742 which indicated that the test assesses cultural awareness.

2. The test-retest method

The test was administered to a randomly chosen group of twenty-five second year English Majors. The pilot study was conducted two weeks prior to the administration of the program. For the reliability rate see table (3)**.**

Table (3)
Reliability Coefficient of the cultural awareness test

The Dimension	Correlation coefficient
Critical reflection	0.825**
Cultural knowledge	0.740**
Behavior	0.901**
Attitude	0.730**
Total	0.884**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table (3) shows correlations between students' scores on each dimension of the test and the total scores in the two administrations of the test which were

calculated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Formula. The reliability coefficient was (0.742) and it was found to be significant at the level (0.01) which is highly accepted.

3- Internal consistency coefficient

It was calculated through correlation coefficients between the total score of the test and each dimension of the test. Table (4) shows these coefficients:

Table (4)
Correlation coefficients between each dimension of the test and total score

The Dimension	Correlation coefficient
Critical reflection	0.642**
Cultural knowledge	0.708**
Behavior	0.858**
Attitude	0.931**

** Correlation is significant at (0.01) level.

Table (4) shows that correlation coefficient between each dimension of the test and the total score of the test is accepted. It is significant at (0.01) level which is acceptable. This indicated that the four areas of the test were consistent with the test.

Item analysis

After scoring the test, an item analysis was done to evaluate the effectiveness of the items. It was revealed that the value of difficulty ranges between 33% and 47%. These values are very suitable and within the acceptable level. The discrimination indices ranged from 0.27 to 0.53. It was found that discrimination values were very suitable and within the acceptable level.

7.2.3. The suggested program

Aim

The suggested program sought to develop some intensive reading skills and critical cultural awareness of second year English majors at Faculty of Education,

New Valley University. The general objectives of the program were formulated as follows:

1. Developing intensive reading skills via analyzing intercultural aspects of the reading comprehension texts.
2. Exploring elements of American culture in authentic texts.
3. Raising awareness of cultural aspects in American and Egyptian cultures.

Content of the suggested program

The program in its final form is organized in four units.
Unit one: Social groups
Unit two: Socialization and life cycle
Unit three: : Ceremonies
Unit four: : Interpersonal relationships

These units are independent. Each unit is about a cultural category and is expected to develop some of intensive reading skills and to raise students' critical awareness of some aspects of American culture. Each unit is divided into two lessons (unit two only has three lessons). These topics are taken from Byram and Zarate (1997), Byram (2021), and Deardorff (2019). They considered them as the most appropriate topics for intercultural purposes. The researcher organized these topics into categories and submitted them to some TEFL experts to determine its appropriateness to the participants. According to the experts' opinion, the most important categories are social groups that included racial discrimination and ethnical diversity; values and traditions that include family, school, and Christmas; ceremonies that entail death and marriage; interpersonal relationships that denote friendship and neighboring.

Each unit begins with general objectives and a commentary on the unit. Each lesson begins with behavioral objectives. The general objectives, behavioral objectives, techniques of teaching, teaching aids, content and evaluation are presented in the teacher's guidebook. The content of the program is mainly based on some selected reading texts (a number of fictional and non-fictional texts) that deal mainly with cultural topics and encourage students to practice intensive reading skills. They were selected and revised by some EFL instructors. They judged them as being suitable to the participants' language level.

The training techniques used in the program were brainstorming, reading literary texts, critical reflection, guided discussion, writing and analyzing intercultural incidents. Teaching activities included note taking, individual work, and group work. Teaching aids included boards and handouts. Evaluation included

formative and summative evaluation. The former is used to provide continuous feedback while the latter is used to determine the extent to which the objectives were achieved.

Validity of the suggested program:

The suggested program was sent to the jury members who were requested to determine the validity of the program in light of clarity of objectives, suitability of the content, teaching activities, and evaluation techniques. The panel reported the validity of the suggested program and raised some minor modifications which were included in the final version of the program.

Piloting the program

To guarantee the suitability of reading texts to the participants' language competence, and to allocate time needed to carry out the activities of the suggested program, and to test the clarity of instructions, the first unit of the suggested program was taught to a group of second year English majors. Results showed positive feedback and findings regarding the previously mentioned aspects.

7.3. The experimental teaching procedures

The content of the program was based mainly on cultural tasks and techniques. Each lesson of the program introduced reading texts to be analyzed culturally and critically. Each lesson went through three stages. The objective of the first stage was to urge students to consider objectively and consciously their native culture. Several reading tasks were used.

First: Brainstorming

- The teacher first explained that the aim of the task is to generate ideas on cultural topics in their country and their experiences related to these topics
- The teacher appointed one person to record the ideas generated by the students. These should be noted in a format that everyone can see and refer to.
- The teacher defined the cultural topic of the lesson and lay out any criteria to be met.
- The teacher asked students to write down all ideas that come to their minds about the cultural topic, to avoid nothing, no matter how strange, and not to worry about grammar or editing.

Second: Cultural Discussion

After each of the above activities, it was important to discuss the participants' own experiences, exchange thoughts, and create more ideas.

Discussion enabled the participants to express their feelings towards under investigation problems.

The second stage sought to deepen the students' understanding and appreciation of a foreign culture and to compare it to their own. Based on what the students have learned in the first stage, they are able to explore the culture of the target language objectively. This stage is based primarily on reading and analyzing authentic texts that reflect the cultural topic of the lesson to extract different situations and behaviors of characters and explore the differences between native and foreign culture. In this stage, students can practice intensive reading and language focus tasks (infer cultural information on the text, judging critically on some characters and their actions and identifying the main theme of the text. They also criticize and reflect critically the foreign cultural practices and values as presented in the text.

This stage included pre reading discussion in which the teacher introduced information about the cultural topic in U.S.A. This activity helped students to form cultural background knowledge to understand the aspects of the text. Students' reading the literary text and taking notes on the cultural information that they have explored. Then, a post reading task where teacher asks students to answer the questions that aim mainly to analyze the text culturally and hold a comparison between American and Egyptian cultures. It also encouraged students to practice various reading skills on the text. Eventually, an intensive reading task in which the teacher asks students to read various short texts analyzing language structures and culture values.

The third stage involved the utilization of a specific technique to facilitate the process of discovering the differences and misunderstandings between the native culture and the American one, and their effects on communication. The teaching technique aimed to raise the participants' awareness of cultural differences via analyzing intercultural or cross-cultural misunderstandings, and to appreciate the significance of such cultural differences in communication.

Procedures of the experiment

To execute the experiment, the following procedures were done:

Pre-testing

The pre-testing instruments were handled in the classroom and lasted for two sessions.

Intervention

The researcher taught the suggested program. It lasted for two months, three hours a week. The period of teaching the suggested program was 27 hours. It started 19- 11- 2024 and ended at 21 -12- 2024.

Post testing

After teaching the program, the tests were administered to the participants of the study group in order to measure the effectiveness of the suggested program in developing their intensive reading skills and critical cultural awareness.

8. Results

The experimental design of the study depended on comparing students' scores on the test before and after teaching the suggested program. The researcher analyzed the quantitative data using "t" test formula.

8.1. Testing of the 1st hypothesis

The first hypothesis indicated that there would be a statistically significant difference between the means of scores obtained by the study group on the pre and posttest of the intensive reading skills (in favor of the posttest). To verify the first hypothesis a statistical analysis was performed. Table (5) shows the mean scores and results of t test .

Table (5)
The pre-post differences of the study group's mean scores in the intensive reading test

Level	Treatment	Mean	Std.	df	*'t'*	Sig.	Blake
Inferential reading	Pre	7.7250	1.15442	39	39.281	0.01	1.46
	post	15.6750	.57233				
Critical	Pre	5.6500	1.25167		34.973	0.01	1.51
	post	13.5500	.74936				
Literal	Pre	4.6500	.94868		26.209	0.01	1.37
	post	10.4500	1.01147				
Total	Pre	16.0250	1.83258		59.709	0.01	.1.44

	Post	37.6750	1.43915

Table (5) shows that the mean scores gained by the experimental group are higher on the post-testing of the intensive reading skills (37.6750) than those obtained on the pretesting (16.0250). "t" value is (59.709), which is significant at (0.05) level. These high gains of the students in the post-testing of the intensive reading skills test could be due to the use of the suggested program. In addition, the results indicated that the suggested program was effective in improving second year English majors' intensive reading skills according to Blake's modified gain ratio (1.44).

8.2. Testing the 2nd hypothesis

Hypothesis two predicted a statistically significant difference between the means of the study group scores on the pre-post test of critical cultural awareness favoring the post application. Table (6) shows the t-test results of pre-post testing of the students' critical cultural awareness.

Table (6)
t-test Results of the students' scores on the pre-posttest of critical cultural awareness

Variable	Application	Mean	Std	"t" value	df	η^2
Critical reflection	Pre	10.00	3.694	**13.158	24	1.14
	Post	17.63	2.661			
Knowledge	Pre	10.12	1.534	**8.194	24	1.26
	Post	17.54	1.884			
Behavior	Pre	10.40	1.818	**6.392	24	1.18
	Post	16.94	1.305			
Attitude	Pre	48.23	6.704	**6.506	24	1.07
	Post	79.06	9.555			
Total	Pre	58.75	8.630	**16.609	24	1.40
	Post	126.80	2.661			

** Significant at 0.01 level

Table (6) showed that there was a statistically significant difference between means of the study group's scores on the pre-post test of critical cultural awareness at the (0.05) level, indicating the development of the participants' critical cultural awareness. Furthermore, the table indicated that the suggested program is effective in developing critical cultural awareness of second year English majors as the Blake value ranged from 1.01 to 1.40 of the test as a whole. These results indicated a high degree of effectiveness.

9. Discussion

The current study sought to investigate the effectiveness of a suggested program based on intercultural communicative approach in developing English majors' intensive reading skills and critical cultural awareness. Findings of the study are encouraging as they showed that there were statistically significant differences between the means of the study group's scores on the pre-post test of intensive reading and critical cultural awareness in favor of the post applications.

The students' scores on the pre-tests were unsatisfactory. The pre-test results for both intensive reading skills and critical cultural awareness of English majors revealed a generally low level of performance. In the intensive reading skills pre-test, many students struggled particularly with inferential and critical questions. While most were able to handle literal comprehension at a basic level, their ability to interpret implied meanings, recognize the author's intentions, evaluate the relevance of arguments, and make critical judgments about the text was noticeably weak. This indicated surface-level reading habits and a lack of deep analytical engagement with texts.

Similarly, the critical cultural awareness pre-test demonstrated a limited proficiency across all measured components: critical reflection, knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes. Students showed difficulties in recognizing and questioning cultural assumptions, exhibited superficial understanding of cultural diversity, and tended to express ethnocentric attitudes rather than open and balanced perspectives. Their responses lacked depth, suggesting minimal exposure to intercultural experiences and underdeveloped reflective thinking skills.

However, the post-test results highlighted significant improvement across both variables. In the intensive reading skills post-test, students exhibited strong gains, particularly in inferential and critical comprehension. They demonstrated the ability to interpret nuanced meanings, connect ideas within the text, assess the reliability of sources, and articulate well-supported conclusions. Their responses reflected a clear shift from passive reading to active, questioning, and evaluative reading practices.

In the critical cultural awareness post-test, students showed increased critical reflection on cultural issues, greater knowledge of both their own and target cultures, and improved behaviors and attitudes characterized by openness, empathy, and respect for cultural diversity. Their answers reflected a deeper understanding of intercultural complexities and a willingness to engage in balanced self and other analysis.

The effectiveness of the suggested program may be due to many factors. The first one lies in the fact that it is based on intercultural communicative approach which emphasizes the importance of providing students with knowledge about the target culture, practicing intercultural skills which include the skills of reflecting on their own and target culture, skills of interpreting and analysis of cultural issues to observe similarities and differences and analyze them from the viewpoints of the others and establishing a relationship between their own culture and the foreign one. All these skills were practiced through reading and analyzing various texts. In this way, the components of the suggested program might have led to such an significant improvement in the participants' performance in the post tests of intensive reading skills and critical cultural awareness.

Furthermore, the explicit incorporation of intercultural communicative tasks throughout the learning process encouraged students to reflect critically on both texts and cultural contexts. Exposure to authentic intercultural scenarios required students to analyze not only language but also underlying cultural meanings. The participants engaged in structured activities such as cultural comparisons, reflective discussions, and problem-solving tasks that required them to go beyond surface understanding, promoting both reading depth and cultural self-awareness. Pair and group discussions encouraged students to verbalize thoughts, share interpretations, and confront cultural differences in a supportive environment, which accelerated both language processing and cultural understanding.

The use of authentic texts may contribute to the effectiveness of the suggested program. Through the suggested program the students were exposed to reading a variety of texts (fictional and non-fictional) and they were asked to analyze them linguistically and culturally. In addition, a wide selection of culturally rich texts exposed students to varied perspectives, enhancing their ability to understand different worldviews and challenging ethnocentric assumptions. This exposure cultivated curiosity and empathy. According to the intercultural communicative approach, the participants practice literal, inferential and critical reading through intercultural analysis of a variety of texts to analyze and reflect on the cultural ideas presented in the texts. Reading an authentic text can be seen as a personal encounter with the foreign culture. The processes of reading and

interpreting a text helped the participants to interact with the text and the foreign culture. These passages enabled students to collect enough cultural information and ideas about a foreign culture, to run comparisons and contrasts between the participants' culture and target language culture.

The teaching procedures adopted, throughout the implementation of the suggested program, might be one of the prominent factors that positively affected the students' intensive reading and critical cultural awareness. These procedures entailed a significant shift in the teacher's role from an authority figure to a discussion organizer, a guide or a facilitator. The teacher is no longer the person who imposes his/her point of view. He/she is there, to offer help when it is really needed. Each unit begins with a comprehensive introduction which provides participants with adequate information about the topic of the unit. After that, students are given the chance to reflect on their own customs, beliefs, and values via a deep discussion and reflection of assigned reading comprehension passages. Then, a section is devoted to discovering the target culture where reading passages are presented to help the readers tackle cultural issues, ethnographic tasks, and, eventually, to project ideas to sustain their independent learning. Readers are expected to develop an open-minded attitude towards other cultures as a result of their intensive reading practice. Finally, the lesson ended with a section entitled "analyzing intercultural incident" which presents various activities and reading passages where students can analyze situations of the foreign culture and try to identify the underlying causes of misunderstanding between cultures.

An essential factor that contributed to the observed improvement in students' performance was the consistent use of continuous formative feedback throughout the intervention. Feedback was strategically embedded at each stage of the learning process, enabling students to recognize both their strengths and areas requiring development in real-time. After completing intensive reading tasks, students received targeted feedback not only on their comprehension accuracy but also on their approach to answering literal, inferential, and critical questions. This allowed them to become aware of recurring mistakes, such as superficial skimming or misinterpretation of implicit meanings, and to adopt corrective reading strategies, including text annotation, predicting, questioning, and summarizing.

Similarly, in tasks designed to develop critical cultural awareness, feedback was provided on the depth of their reflections, the relevance and accuracy of their cultural knowledge, and the openness and empathy displayed in their responses. The teacher emphasized constructive questioning techniques and encouraged students to reconsider assumptions, validate evidence, and refine their intercultural attitudes. This iterative cycle of task performance, feedback, and self-adjustment

gradually strengthened students' metacognitive regulation, enhanced their ability to engage in reflective analysis, and nurtured both their critical reading and cultural interpretation skills. Over time, students shifted from a passive reliance on teacher correction to independently monitoring and evaluating their comprehension processes and cultural reasoning, which ultimately led to more confident and sophisticated performances in the post-test. The regular feedback loops functioned as scaffolding that promoted both autonomy and deeper engagement with the language and cultural content.

Findings of the present study align strongly with and extend the conclusions of prior research that highlights the interconnection between intensive reading, intercultural communicative competence, and critical cultural awareness. The noticeable improvement in both students' intensive reading skills and their critical cultural awareness after the intervention supports Linares' (2023) assertion that reading, in an EFL context, not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also sharpens learners' intercultural sensitivity by exposing them to diverse cultural references and implicit meanings embedded in authentic texts. This is further supported by Rahman et al. (2024), whose schema theory-based research emphasizes the crucial role of cultural background knowledge in shaping reading comprehension, suggesting that culturally rich materials stimulate both cognitive and interpretive engagement, which was evident in the post-test outcomes of this study. Similarly, the results echo Corbett's (2022) proposition that English language instruction should evolve from a solely linguistic focus to nurturing intercultural competence, empowering students to not only decode textual information but also critically assess it through the lens of their own and others' cultural perspectives — a skill that was notably enhanced throughout this research.

Moreover, the students' ability to reflect on and evaluate the social and cultural dimensions of texts confirmed the argument advanced by Osborn (2021), who highlighted the importance of teaching learners to "critically reason about" and "critically evaluate" authentic texts, which encourages deeper intercultural understanding and personal cultural self-awareness. The progress observed in this study's post-test also directly resonates with Byram's (2021) conceptualization of critical cultural awareness as a reflective and evaluative process that enables learners to navigate cultural perspectives and values, thereby fostering a more nuanced and ethically aware engagement with global discourse. In addition, the findings align with Hoff's (2020) argument that cultivating critical cultural awareness equips learners with the social and political tools necessary for responsible and reflective language use in diverse contexts.

This study also reinforces conclusions drawn by Liu and Fang (2021), Fang (2017), Nugent and Catalano (2015), Cierpisz (2022), Fenner (2016), Schat et al. (2022), and Hazaea (2020), all of whom highlight the essential role of integrating critical cultural awareness into EFL teaching as a pathway to enhance intercultural competence and to stimulate learners' reflective skills. The results of this study demonstrate that when reading strategies are combined with intercultural inquiry, students not only develop linguistic accuracy and comprehension but also grow as critical, culturally aware thinkers, capable of navigating complex intercultural encounters with sensitivity and understanding.

10. Conclusion

The findings of this study clearly demonstrated that using intercultural communicative approach enhanced significantly intensive reading skills and critical cultural awareness of English major students. The pre-test results initially revealed students' limited ability to comprehend texts beyond the literal level and a superficial understanding of intercultural dimensions, marked by fragmented reflections, ethnocentric attitudes, and difficulty in identifying implicit cultural meanings. However, after the structured intervention which combined targeted reading strategies with systematic intercultural reflection , the post-test results showed marked improvements. Students not only displayed more advanced reading skills across literal, inferential, and critical dimensions, but they also demonstrated deeper critical cultural awareness, reflected in their ability to question stereotypes, recognize cultural values, and adopt more open and empathetic attitudes toward diverse perspectives.

These outcomes confirmed that language proficiency cannot be fully developed in isolation from intercultural competence, especially in globalized and multicultural communication contexts. The use of intercultural communicative approach along with reading tasks encouraged students to move beyond decoding texts mechanically and fostered a more thoughtful, reflective engagement with both language and culture. Factors such as continuous formative feedback, task-based learning, critical questioning, and guided reflection played a central role in helping students internalize both linguistic and intercultural knowledge.

Overall, the study highlighted the pedagogical value of merging language learning with intercultural education, suggesting that equipping students with both reading strategies and cultural insight are essential for preparing them to become competent, flexible, and culturally sensitive communicators in real-world English language contexts.

11. Recommendations

Based on the positive outcomes of this study, instructors are requested to use intercultural communicative approach as a central methodology for intensive reading instruction. They are requested to move beyond traditional text-based comprehension exercises by embedding tasks that encourage students to reflect on cultural perspectives, question stereotypes, and analyze texts through both linguistic and intercultural lenses. Instructors are encouraged to provide ongoing formative feedback on students' reading strategies and cultural reflections, guiding them to refine their comprehension and intercultural sensitivity progressively. Moreover, fostering an inquiry-based classroom environment where students are invited to discuss, compare, and critically reflect on cultural themes will further develop their critical cultural awareness alongside their language skills.

The positive results of the study may encourage curriculum designers to build reading programs that explicitly balance linguistic objectives with intercultural learning outcomes. Text selection should prioritize authentic, culturally rich materials that represent diverse perspectives and encourage comparative cultural analysis. Reading tasks should go beyond surface-level comprehension and include inferential, critical, and reflective exercises that foster intercultural understanding. Additionally, curricula should allocate space for collaborative activities, such as group discussions, debates, and projects, where students can explore global issues and cultural concepts in depth, using English as a tool for communication and critical thought.

Language education policymakers should admit the increasing significance of intercultural communicative approach in developing students' global readiness and employability. Policymakers are encouraged to adopt frameworks that embed ICC outcomes in national and institutional language learning standards, ensuring that reading comprehension is not treated as an isolated skill but as part of a broader competence that includes intercultural awareness and critical thinking. Investment in teacher training programs is also essential, so that educators are equipped with the theoretical knowledge and practical tools necessary to integrate intercultural learning into reading instruction effectively. Finally, assessment policies may be reshaped to include new evaluation criteria that measure not only linguistic proficiency but also students' capacity for intercultural reflection, critical inquiry, and global perspective-taking.

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